Minor Pentatonic Harmony

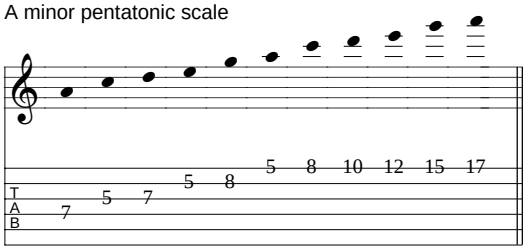
BY KEVIN LUTKE

THE MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE (1, ♭3, 4, 5, ♭7) is an excellent source of harmony and arpeggios that you can use in your solos or rhythm grooves. Here's how to extract three-note chords from an *A* minor pentatonic scale (**Ex. 1**).

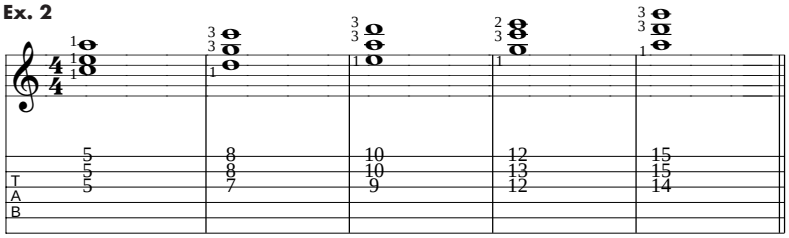
Synthesizing harmony. Let's start with a 1st inversion *Am* at the fifth position, as shown in **Ex. 2**. The notes in this triad all belong to *A* minor pentatonic. Staying on the top three strings, work your way up the fretboard, changing each chord tone to the next available note within *A* minor pentatonic. For example, this *Am* triad evolves from *C-E-A* to *D-G-C* to *E-A-D*, and so on. The chords in bars 2 and 3 are stacked fourths. Bar 4 yields a 2nd inversion *C* triad, and bar 5 contains another set of stacked fourths.

Ex. 1

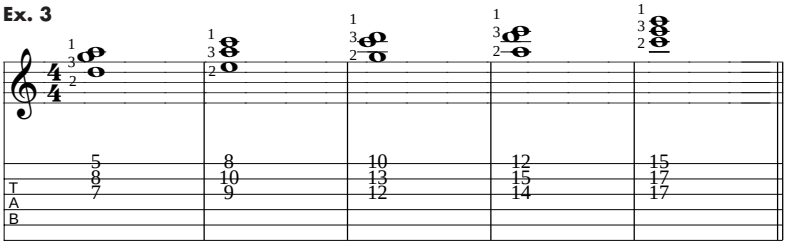
A minor pentatonic scale



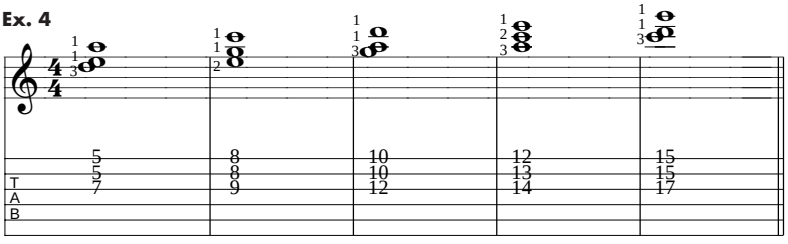
Ex. 2



Ex. 3

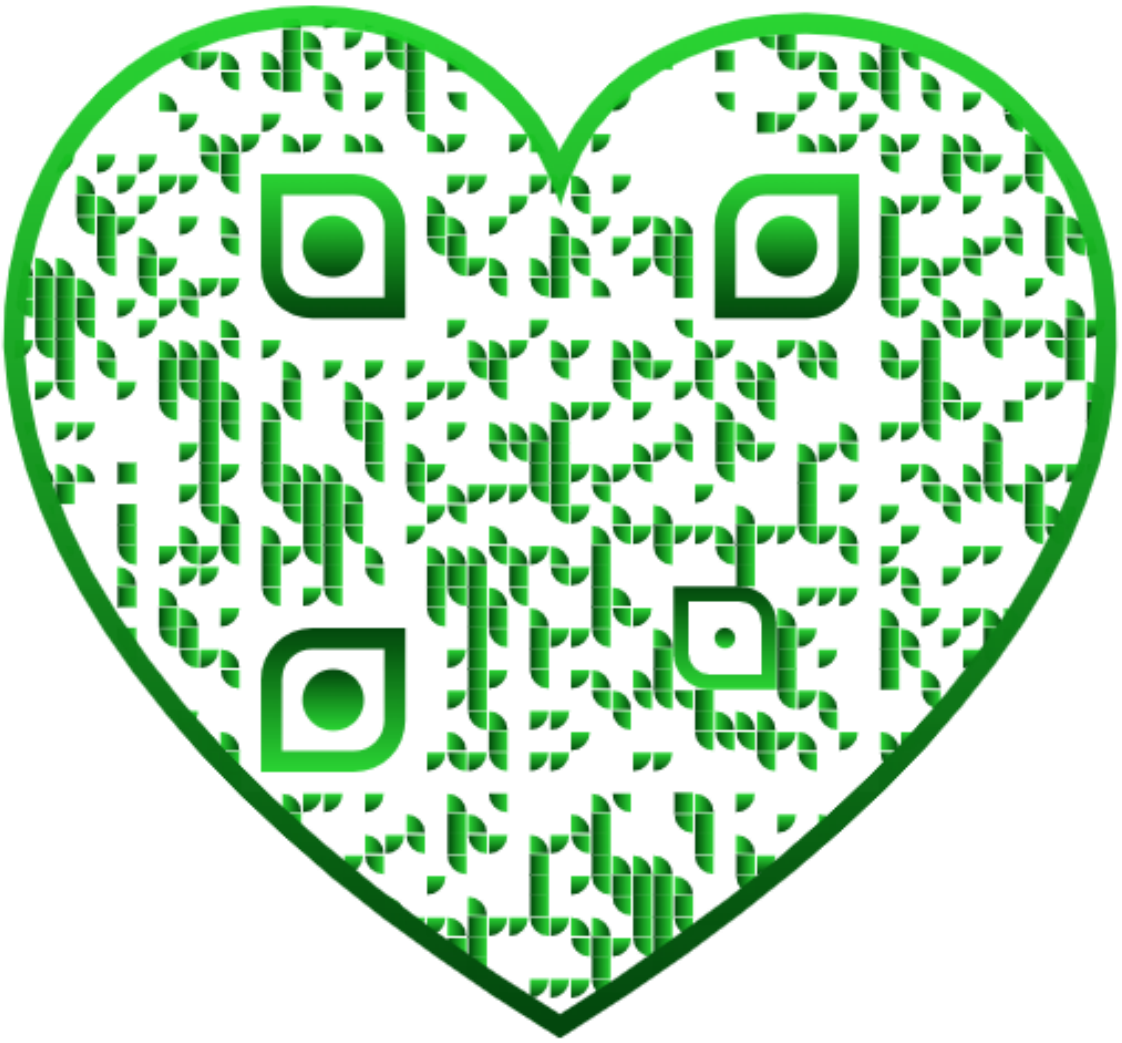


Ex. 4



New shapes. You don't have to start with a standard triad. As long as you begin with three notes from *A* minor pentatonic, you're in business. Look at **Ex. 3**, for instance, which launches with a *D-G-A* voicing. As before, each new chord is created by simultaneously advancing through the *A* minor pentatonic scale on the three top strings. The voicings in bars 1, 3, and 4 consist of a major second stacked on a fourth. In bars 2 and 5, the voicings contain a minor third atop a fourth (for a 2nd inversion *Am*), and a minor third on a major third (a root position *C*).

Ex. 4 begins with a *D-E-A* voicing and ascends through *A* minor pentatonic. This time, the process yields fourths on major seconds (bars 1, 3, and 5), a fourth above a minor third (bar 2's 1st inversion *C*), and a major third on a minor third (bar 4's root-position *Am*).

Experiment with different string sets to discover voicings of your own. You can use the resulting harmony to create fresh progressions or unusual arpeggios for soloing.

New Yorker Kevin Lutke has two CDs—*Fallenwood* and *Road to Santa Ynez*—on Ampersand Records.